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WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
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TO: Members of the Washington State Board of Health

FROM: Craig McLaughlin  
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RE: UPDATE ON EFFORTS TO IMPROVE FYI

**Background and Summary**

Executive Director Don Sloma asked me, shortly after I came to work for the Board, to explore ways to augment the *FYI* section of the agenda. This addendum to each month's final draft agenda, as you know, contains information about correspondence to and from the Board, conferences, and publications related to the Board's work. Much of the information collected for and included in *FYI* has been gathered passively. The thinking behind the "*FYI* improvement project" was to look at ways we could be more proactive in gathering information, and then use that information to produce a more substantial and useful product. The new and improved *FYI* would provide the Board with more information, but it would also make the Board more of a "go to source" of information for public health professionals, thereby increasing awareness of Board activities. Publishing a more comprehensive version of *FYI* on the Web, for example, might draw more people to the site on a regular basis.

The staff conducted two related pieces of research to identify the most useful sources of information. As part of the priorities research project, during which 75 people participated in interviews or completed on-line surveys, we asked about the information sources that helped shape the respondents' opinions about public health priorities. The questions asked about general types of sources (e.g., government reports or the popular press) and well as the names of specific sources they found influential. In addition, Board staff commissioned the University of Washington Health Policy Analysis Program to survey health policy professionals about their information sources. Researchers sent a survey to 50 individuals and received 11 responses. Additionally, HPAP identified key contacts for regulatory matters and initiatives related to health in state eight agencies.

The remainder of this memo summarizes the results of this research and outlines how staff will use this information to make *FYI* more useful while minimizing adverse impacts on staff workload. In brief, Board staff will monitor eight key Web sites and contact key policy staff at eight agencies monthly before each Board meeting; identify relevant journal articles by reviewing tables of contents of 10 journals; contact 10 organizations to ensure notification of conferences, meetings, etc.; and modify the Web site to make *FYI* information easily accessible and keep it current between Board meetings.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the respondents are relying increasingly on electronic information sources, including key Web sites (most notably the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention) and daily alert services that provide news synopses via e-mail. The level of reading original sources—as opposed to, say, scanning abstracts—varied widely depending on the individual and his or her duties. Many people reported relying on the popular press to find out about breaking research and then using the Web to follow up. Several people rely on electronic services that search the popular press and retrieve articles on specific subjects.

**Action:** *Policy staff will continue to monitor Department of Health daily press briefings for items that should be included in FYI. I will identify and subscribe to an on-line notification service that forwards relevant articles that appear in the national press. I will forward articles to policy staff so they can review for possible inclusion in FYI.*

The respondents rely on dozens of different Web sites for information. Those that were mentioned multiple times are:

1. Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention
2. Northwest Center for Public Health Practice
3. National Council of County and City Health Officials
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
5. National Academy for State Health Policy
6. National Conference of State Legislatures
7. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
8. Kaiser Family Foundation

**Action:** *I will sign up for notification services, when available, that alert people to changes in content of the Web sites listed above. Monthly before each Board meeting I will visit each site and review for new material that should be included in FYI. Staff members who visit these sites in the course of their work will be alert for new content that might be appropriate for FYI.*

The respondents likewise rely on dozens of different journals. The ten that were mentioned most often and whose content is most relevant to the Board's activities are:

1. American Health Line
2. American Journal of Preventive Medicine
3. American Journal of Public Health
4. Health Affairs
5. Journal of the American Medical Association
6. Journal of Environmental Health
7. Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law
8. Morbidity and Mortality Week Report
9. The Nation's Health
10. New England Journal of Medicine

Electronic delivery of the tables of contents for most of these journals is available from the publishers or the Washington State Library. WSL provides print notification for others by campus mail. American Health Line and MMWR can be delivered electronically. Full text for many others is available electronically to state employees (including Board members) through WSL Web site.

**Action:** *I have signed up for table of contents notification or electronic delivery of the above publications. Tables of contents are being forwarded to all policy staff so they can review for possible FYI items. I will add Board members to the distribution list by request. Board staff will work with Board members to obtain WSL library cards and full text versions of all articles.*

Respondents were also asked to provide the names of organizations they relied on for conferences, meetings, and related activities. The ten mentioned most often were.

1. American Public Health Association
2. National Association of City and County Health Officials
3. National Academy for State Health Policy
4. National Conference of State Legislatures
5. Washington State Public Health Association
6. Washington State Medical Association
7. Washington State Environmental Health Association
8. American Association of Health Plans
9. Environmental Protection Agency
10. National Association of Insurance Commissioners

**Action:** *A letter will be sent to each of the above organizations requesting that we receive relevant newsletters, conference announcements, meeting notifications, etc. Staff will also identify a single point of contact. Monthly before each meeting a staff member will visit the Web site of each organization to check for current announcements and other relevant material.*

HPAP, at the Board's request, identified primary contact people for health-related policy and regulated matters in eight state agencies—Health, Ecology, Labor and Industries, Veteran's Affairs, Corrections, Social and Health Services, Health Care Authority, Health Care Facilities Authority, and Office of the Insurance Commissioner (attached).

**Action:** *Staff will notify each of these contact people of our interest in following health-related policy and regulatory development, including hearings, public comment periods, etc. Staff will check in with these individuals monthly prior to each Board meeting.*

One of the notions driving this project, as mentioned above, is to encourage public health professionals to see the Board, and specifically its Web site, as a go-to source of information. This will require doing more with FYI than adding it to the back of the agenda. It will also require that it be maintained more frequently than once every month. At the same time, it is important that we carefully manage the impact FYI will have on staff resources.

**Action:** *As part of current efforts to revamp the Web site, I will build a section called FYI. This will include a regularly maintained list of publications, conferences, meetings, agency policy development etc. It will also include a list of links to Web sites we monitor (see attached draft). Over the next few months, staff will work to identify the appropriate scope of FYI, define the relationship between agenda materials and the Web site, and find ways to manage the workflow in ways that maximize usefulness of FYI while carefully managing the impact on staff workload.*